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Canadian Miracle

BY
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The Canadian Miracle

The above title is the typical expression of that great French writer, Maurice Barrès, who, quite amazed at the survival of the French Canadians after well-nigh one and a half century of separation from France, called it: "*Le Miracle canadien.*"

Although our friends beyond the border are not as a rule, much concerned about their neighbors to the north, it may be of interest to the readers of the CATHOLIC MIND to learn what the Canadian miracle is. The more so because for the past few weeks several newspapers and reviews of the United States have published articles at least prompted, if not written, by men hostile to our faith and institutions.

To understand the French position, two points must be clearly borne in mind: the first is that the 60,000 French people of 1763, the year of the Treaty of Paris which definitely handed them over to the English Crown, have now grown to about 3,500,000, of whom 2,054,890, out of a total population of 7,206,643 are in Canada (census of 1911); the second is that in Canada the French language is officially recognized to be on a par with the English.

This legal recognition was not of course attained without a struggle. Indeed the contest over it was as bitter as it was prolonged. The four documents bearing on the subject during the so-called absolute *régime* (1760-1791) are the Capitulation of Quebec, that of Montreal, the

Treaty of Paris and the Quebec Act. True, we do not find in them any precise reference to the use of this or that language. The cultured men who drew them up apparently had no misgivings on that score. They couched the articles in such general terms as these: "The inhabitants shall be preserved in possession of their houses and estates . . . with their customs and privileges and all their other civil rights." They believed that these and similar provisions, added to the dictates of the natural law, in virtue of which the right to one's tongue is inherent to man's nature, were enough to ensure the free use of the conquered people's own language.

It is a matter of historical fact that the years that immediately followed the conquest were calm and peaceful. Both the English and the French tongues were freely used in various departments. In fact French rather than English was used in writing deeds in the courts of the country. This practice, moreover, was approved of by such English jurists as Marriott and Wedderburne, and by the first Governors, Murray, Carleton and Haldimand.

In 1791, Canada was divided into Lower (French) and Upper (English) Canada, and a House of Parliament established in each of them. Then began the struggle. Although but a handful in the Quebec Assembly, the English Representatives wanted one of their number to be speaker of the House; moreover a bill was proposed to make English the only official language. Both projects being defeated, a union of the two Canadas was secretly prepared, in which the use of the French language was to be proscribed, and the English-Canadians, who were as yet but one-fifth of the population, should command, by means of a skilful handling of counties, a solid majority in the legislature. When the scheme was made known in 1822, it met with such oppo-

sition that the British Government was forced to abandon it, at least for a time.

However other difficulties were cropping up along with that of nationality. Petitions and delegations were sent to London but without much avail. Finally the smoldering discontent broke out into an armed rebellion in 1837 and 1838. After being crushed with a brutal hand, the rising, though limited to two or three counties, gave the Government a pretext for enforcing the union of Lower and Upper Canada which had been planned a quarter of a century before, and in 1841 it actually took place. The end in view was the deliberate absorption of the French element by the English; and of course one of the articles of the union was the silencing of the French language in Parliament. The opposition succeeded, seven years later, in having that clause struck out. For at that time, the high birth-rate of the French had raised their number to nearly 700,000, giving them a majority of about 240,000 over their English fellow-countrymen. Yet the representation in the House remained the same: forty-two members for both Provinces.

Years rolled on and the French language, without losing its grip on Quebec, progressed, strange to say, even in Ontario. The best proof of this is the answer, dated April 24, 1857, given by Dr. Ryerson, the founder of the Ontario school system, regarding the teaching of French in a public school. He wrote: "I have the honor to state in reply to your letter of the 16th instant, that as the French is the recognized language of the country, as well as the English, it is quite proper and lawful for the Trustees to allow both languages to be taught in their schools to children whose parents may desire them to learn both."

We now come to the time of the Confederation of the

Canadian Provinces, an event which happened in 1867, and has endured to this day. The purpose of its Fathers, as we call them, was to put an end to the disunion of the two races, to join them without fusing them, and to place them on an equal footing as to rights and privileges. It was in this spirit of justice and statesmanship that Articles Ninety-three and One hundred and Thirty-three of the British North America Act were enacted: the former leaving to the several Provinces the power to make laws regarding education, without however infringing upon the rights or privileges of any class of persons; the latter ordering the use of either language to be optional in the Parliament of the Dominion, in the Legislature of Quebec and before the Federal and the Quebec courts, but in the archives of the Ottawa and Quebec Houses, the use of both was to be obligatory.

But what about the use of this or that tongue in the schools? I confess there is nothing exactly specified with regard to that. Men like Macdonald, Cartier and the others, who drew up the Constitution did not anticipate any trouble about that matter; and, at any rate, they thought that to decree the free or binding use of French and English, was tantamount to allowing both to be taught in the schools. And really does not the private and public use of a language require it to be thoroughly learned, and does not such instruction suppose and entail its careful and prolonged teaching?

This has been so well understood by the French Province of Quebec in its dealings with the English element of the Province that, whereas all the English Provinces have encroached upon the teaching of French in some way or other, or simply forbidden it altogether, as did the Manitoba legislature last year, the province of Quebec has ever given full liberty to its Protestant English minority

in the matter of education. This plan works thus: Under the nominal authority of the Lieutenant-Governor in council, with a superintendent at the head of the Department, there is a Council of Public Instruction, composed of Catholics and Protestants, to make laws of general utility. But for matters relating in any way to Catholic or Protestant interests, they separate, and form two committees perfectly independent of each other, having their own meetings, administering their own funds, dividing the Province into school districts, building their own schools, primary and normal, drawing up their own program of studies, and examinations, choosing the textbooks, naming the inspectors, etc.

Hence no possible clash between the French and English population, between Catholics and Protestants, hence in the province an era of perfect harmony and undisturbed peace. This state of things, which is well nigh ideal for a mixed community as ours, is the simple outcome of elementary justice and common sense. We cannot help wishing, in the name of organized common sense, it would also obtain in the other eight provinces of the Dominion.

At present the Province of Ontario is in the lime light on account of its behaviour towards its French minority. Before handling it, I wish to sum up in a few lines the standing of the French-Canadians in the Dominion.

They number, as I have said before, 2,054,890 out of a total population of 7,206,643 (census of 1911). In the Province of Quebec, the total population being 2,003,232, they are 1,605,339. The remaining 450,000 are scattered about in the various provinces. They claim they are at home anywhere in this broad Dominion, as well as any other British subject. Nay more: they feel at home in Canada, in a deeper sense perhaps than

any other ethnical group. Besides the fact of their being the first settlers, Canada is their *only* home. There is no *old country* for them as there is for Englishmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen. Not even France may thus be called. France is ever cherished as the old mother country; but the real *patrie* for a French-Canadian is Canada, only Canada, and the whole of Canada.

From what has been said of the legal status of the French language, it is most natural that French Canadians should cling to it as to the language of dear old France. Genuine French, by the way, is spoken by them, not a *patois*. It is the language of Canada's discoverers, pioneers and missionaries, the language of those great men who have illustrated her history up to the conquest of 1760, and who have since fought the good fight to guard unalloyed the treasure of French-Canadian ideals. They cling to it also owing to its inner beauty, its magnificent literature, its peculiar excellence as a means of communication which sets it on the lips of international diplomacy.

Lastly they jealously guard it because it is the best means for grouping themselves together, establishing new parishes, preserving their customs, their institutions and even their Faith. They keep in it, like gems in a jewel-case, the clear, familiar and ever-cherished expressions of their dogmas and morals; in it again they find abundant food for their faith, for the French language provides, as is well known, the most wealthy Catholic literature in the world. Best of all perhaps, as a common language favors marriages among themselves, they almost entirely escape that deadliest plague of modern life, mixed marriages. Their religion, therefore, finds in the French tongue both a prop and a safeguard.

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No doubt the use of the French language in the Province of Ontario, is at present the crucial point of the whole question. Since 1867, the French-Canadians in Ontario have increased rapidly. Some of them take for their sons new farms, in the counties bordering on Quebec territory; others work in the mines, in the woods, along the railways; and usually settle together, thus gradually forming new French centers. They number today 250,000, or about half the Catholic population of Ontario, out of a total population of 2,523,274 (census of 1911). Having formed a regular Association of Education in 1910, conscious of their number and of the power it gave them, they petitioned the Ontario Government to organize better the bilingual schools, which until then had been sadly neglected. Far from claiming the perfect liberty which the Province of Quebec gives its English minority, the petitioners modestly begged some French as a part of the program of studies, without unduly burdening teachers and pupils, and for the recruiting and training of teachers they suggested the erection of Normal bilingual schools.

The answer to this request was first an inquiry into the working of the English-French schools of the Province, an investigation which disclosed many excellent features and of course some weak points. The second step was to pass an act whereby the English language was to be henceforward the sole medium of instruction and communication in the public and separate schools, except where ignorance of English would make it impracticable. And upon the strength of that legislative resolution, a circular of instructions was issued in 1912 under the now famous name, "Regulation Seventeen." Another Regulation Seventeen was given out in 1913 with few alterations. The main points of the document are:

"Where necessary . . . French may be used as the language of instruction and communication; but such use of French shall not be continued beyond Form I . . . In schools where French has hitherto been a subject of study, the Public or Separate School Board, as the case may be, may provide . . . for instruction in French reading, grammar, and composition in Forms I to IV . . . Such instruction in French shall not interfere with the adequacy of the instruction in English . . . and shall not in any day exceed one hour in each classroom . . ."

It is evident from the above that French was to be but a secondary matter of study and yet an added burden for teachers and pupils. Still more: there is a peculiar proviso in the simple word "hitherto." Although innocent looking, it was full of menace. For, the French-Canadians, wherever they go, cluster together, found new parishes, and consequently new school districts. Now with Regulation Seventeen and its "hitherto," they may not have French taught in their new schools, although their children may be the majority in them, sometimes forming nearly the whole attendance. This is no mere fancy; it is a fact. The undesirable clause has already been rigorously applied by the Government: for instance, in Windsor, where no French is allowed in a school having sixty per cent French pupils and in two other schools 85 per cent; at Glengarry, where there are 41 French out of 56 pupils, and at Roxboro, 23 out of 26. Which proves that the suppression of the French language in Ontario is at the bottom of the scheme. As an old English teacher of Ontario, an M. A. and a distinguished writer, said of the measure: "If it is not meant totally to stamp out French, then it's a monument of insanity."

The French-Canadians would not of course submit to such a pedagogical program, which would have caused a rapid alteration of their language and finally its complete disappearance. They therefore kept on teaching French in spite of the withdrawal of school grants and the loss of the teachers' certificates.

In 1914, the Federal city of Ottawa became the storm-center of the struggle. Out of a total population of 87,062, the French number 25,346. They own 18 schools, 114 teachers and 5,300 pupils. The English-speaking Catholics have fewer schools, teachers and pupils. There is but one Catholic Board of Trustees, which was composed of French and English members in equal numbers. All the French trustees naturally, and two at least of the English, resolutely opposed Regulation Seventeen. It was with deep regret that the French Canadians saw, at Ottawa and elsewhere, English-speaking Catholics, some covertly, others openly, working against them, and thus siding with their enemies, the Orangemen.

Instead of the Board a Commission was then appointed by the Government to manage the schools. It had no effect on the situation. Pecuniary help came to the defenders of the French from the Province of Quebec and other centers. Conciliatory proposals for a compromise were made in vain to the Ontario Government. The only answer was: "Accept Regulation Seventeen." In February, 1916, the teachers of all the bilingual schools of Ottawa, deprived of their salary, went on a strike. More than 4,000 children were thus kept out of school for months. Toronto still remaining unmoved, the matter was brought up to the Dominion Parliament. The cure for the evil was not to be found there either: the majority refused to interfere in the matter. Meanwhile two actions had been entered in the higher courts of the

Province: one known as the Mackell appeal on Regulation Seventeen, the other by the Board against the Government for the appointment of the new Commission. Both lawsuits having been lost to the Trustees, there was but one recourse left to them, an appeal to the King's Privy Council in London.

The pleadings took place in July of last year, and the judgment was given out in November. It was after the manner of Solomon's: for Regulation Seventeen was declared legal, the Government School Commission illegal.

I have no wish to discuss at length the above judgment. I may be permitted however to say this much: Regulation Seventeen is declared *intra vires* of the legislature which sanctioned it. The learned judges came to that conclusion after weighing, sifting, scrutinizing the words of the British North America Act of 1867. The inference is that the *letter* of the Constitution is really such, and therefore Regulation Seventeen being within the compass of that letter is legal. But what about the *spirit* of the Constitution? And if that spirit were far broader than the letter, so as to forbid a regulation of the Seventeen brand, would then Regulation Seventeen, still remaining *legal*, be at the same time *legitimate*? "The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."

That the spirit of the Constitution was and is in fact wider than the letter, and that the words used by the Fathers of the British North America Act, who never expected the present troubles, implied the division of the schools not only with regard to denominational teaching but according to the use of this or that language as a medium of instruction, we have the testimony of the most eminent of the framers of the Federal Compact, Sir John A. Macdonald. When working out the articles

in 1865, he said it was understood among the delegates that the use of the French language should form one of the principles upon which to base the Confederation. And twenty-five years later, in the House of Commons he said again:

“I have no accord with the desire expressed in some quarters that by any mode whatever there should be an attempt made to oppress the one language or to render it inferior to the other... We have a Constitution now under which all British subjects are in a position of absolute equality, having equal rights of every kind, of language, of religion, of property and person.”

At the time of the wiring of the Privy Council's judgment across the ocean, a letter from the Pope, “*Commissio divinitus*,” was sent to the Cardinal Archbishop of Quebec, and to the other Archbishops and Bishops of Canada, the purpose of which was admirably commented by the great theologian of Quebec, Mgr. L. A. Pâquet. His commentary, approved by the Pope himself, is thus summed up: First, the reason of the letter is the desire to bring peace to the contending parties. Secondly, the following principles are laid down: In mixed parishes, let both languages be used. As to schools, the French Canadians have the right to defend their language, to have an equitable teaching of it, and therefore the right to keep it; the Ontario Government has also the indubitable right to enforce the teaching of the English language in the schools, through lawful means and not exclusive of another language. Thirdly, failing an amicable understanding between Catholics, a tribunal is suggested, namely that of the Bishops and, in their default, the Holy See.

In compliance with the Holy Father's orders, the Bishops of Ontario met to deliberate upon the situation. The result was a collective letter dated January 30, 1917, addressed to the clergy and laity of their respective dioceses. To Catholics they recommend peaceful obedience to the just laws and regulations concerning the schools (Regulation Seventeen, be it noted, is not considered a just regulation by the French Canadians). As for Protestants, they "Ask the majority in the province to consider sympathetically the aspirations and requests of their French-Canadian fellow-citizens in the matter of the establishment and operation of English-French schools, facilitating an equitable teaching of the French language together with a thorough acquisition of English." If this would obtain on the part of the Ontario Government, all agitation from the French minority would instantly vanish.

But as matters stand at present, there is no improvement whatever, and no prospect of it either. Regulation Seventeen is still upheld in its entirety. Yet the schools in Ottawa and elsewhere are continuing to teach French as before. This lately has moved the Ontario legislature to pass another bill "respecting the Appointment of a Commission for the Ottawa Separate Schools," in case the Board of Trustees should make further default. The whole question seems therefore firmly grounded in the *statu quo*, than which a more deplorable state of affairs can hardly be conceived.

Which one of the two antagonists will yield first? Certainly not the French-Canadians, as I know them. And really, to submit to Regulation Seventeen *in toto* and be satisfied with the crumbs of French it throws away to them, would be simply suicidal. After a few generations there would be little left of the French race in Ontario.

This would have a bad effect elsewhere. Indeed the bad example of Ontario has already been followed and even outrun by the Province of Manitoba. The contagion would spread and might come to threaten the heart of the race in Quebec. Such an issue doubtless as the extinction of the French tongue in Canada, is ardently desired by Protestants and by many English-speaking Catholics. And as the desire is father to the thought, it has been freely predicted as a sure thing in the near future, and unfortunately often accepted as such in Toronto, in Ottawa, in England and in Rome. It has led to many misunderstandings, to biassed judgments about the French-Canadians who, they think, unduly resist the force of events and thus hinder the greater good of Church and State. . . — Well, the thought, the desire, the prophecy are to no purpose; they are doomed to an unmitigated failure. For never in the whole stretch of our checkered history has French been more spoken, more cherished, more guarded, more deeply set in the heads and hearts of the French people. It is bound ever to move on. You might as well try to stem the onward course of the mighty St. Lawrence.

And mark this: the revival of French in the English provinces is due to the present persecution. It awakened our folks. They were slumbering before in the boat, carelessly drifting down the current of anglicisation; and if they had been left alone, the end our adversaries had in view would have been reached without a blow. It was a slow process, but safe. To make it faster, they spoiled it. Persecution always stiffens the backbone of the persecuted. It is sheer want of psychology (notice Germans versus Allies) to think that frightfulness will ever deter a strenuous adversary. Quite the opposite. Never, as I said, have the French-Canadians been so

alive to the danger of losing their treasure, never so keen to defend it. Why, they would fain erect a statue to the man (they know him) who first fired the gun that startled them to their feet !

To conclude: Canada is officially a bilingual country; it will stay as such. The French language was first on our shores, and to all appearances will endure till doom's day. The sooner all parties concerned make up their mind about it, the better. English and French men will ever live here facing one another: a prospect more or less pleasing to them, but it's a golden rule that advises us calmly to submit to the inevitable, as long as we live in this vale of tears. — To encourage them in their resolve, the Frenchmen have on their side natural law, sane pedagogy, the spirit of the Constitution, three centuries of practice and a splendid record of loyalty to the British Crown; they have with them all the French-Canadian Catholics, from the highest in Church and State to the humblest commoner; they have besides many highly educated English speaking Catholics, among whom I must mention the editor of the scholarly *Casket* of Antigonish; they even have several Protestants whose heart is as broad and noble as their mind.

May we not hope therefore that little by little better judgments and feelings will prevail throughout the land, and that the strains of peace will resound in purest harmony on the three-stringed lyre of truth, justice and charity ?

Another felicitous and most prayed for "Canadian Miracle" !

F. C.